



URBAN AND REGIONAL POLICY PAPER

2016 | NO. 20

SMALL OPPORTUNITY CITIES

Transforming Small Post-Industrial Cities
into Resilient Communities

WAYNE FEIDEN

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The German Marshall Fund
of the United States

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Please direct inquiries to:

The German Marshall Fund of the United States
1744 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
T 1 202 683 2650
F 1 202 265 1662
E info@gmfus.org

This publication can be downloaded for free at <http://www.gmfus.org/listings/research/type/publication>.

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On the cover: Public art display in Vejle, Denmark. ©Wayne Feiden

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¹ Wayne Feiden is director of planning and sustainability for the city of Northampton, Massachusetts. He was a 2014-15 German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) Urban and Regional Policy Fellow. The paper builds on and draws from four blogs published by GMF as part of that fellowship. The findings and conclusions, however, are strictly those of the author and not of GMF.

Executive Summary

This policy paper focuses on some aspects of how small and medium size weak-market, post-industrial, and/or underinvested places can become more resilient and sustainable. As an urban and regional policy fellow for The German Marshall Fund the United States in spring 2015, I traveled to three small European cities to explore how each had crafted a long-term revitalization strategy.

As a director of planning and sustainability, I am interested in how these lessons apply to my own city, Northampton, Massachusetts. Northampton is a small city (population 29,000) that underwent a significant industrial decline in the middle of the 20th century. Northampton now has a vibrant downtown and a regional reputation as a progressive and thriving community. This means that it lacks the abandoned buildings, vacant lots, empty commercial buildings, and high unemployment common in many recent post-industrial cities, but it still shares some post-industrial experiences. Similar with other post-industrial and weak-market neighborhoods and cities, Northampton has more than its share of obsolete infrastructure, a growing divide between working class and professional class workers, large homeless and low income populations, a relatively weak market that makes investment in new downtown buildings difficult, no net population growth, and median income significantly below that of the state.

The investigation in three small European communities shows that a revitalization panacea does not exist. Not surprisingly, the most effective way to build a stronger community is to build on a community's own unique history, assets, and opportunities. Searching for that elusive silver bullet or hot new trend that solves all problems is hopeless. Daniel Burnham famously said "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will not themselves be realized."

He should have added in the same vein, "Make only plans that build on your community's unique strengths, attributes, dreams, and aspirations."

My European research showed that communities must use the transformative power of arts and culture to build on local history and assets and must make building a vibrant city center an integral of those efforts. Further, policymakers must give emphasis to the equitable treatment of all citizens and to social cohesion in their city. Finally, for these three approaches to work, they must be part of a broader political commitment to a strategic and comprehensive approach.

Each of the three communities approached their revitalization process differently. Derry, Northern Ireland, is changing its local and national self-image through the transformative power of arts and culture; Derry is also struggling to ensure that cohesion and the success of all citizens is strengthened through its community-building efforts. York, England, is committed to ensuring that its city center remains the center of community life for all of its citizens in spite of new investment and strong centrifugal forces. Vejle, Denmark, is making enormous political and capital investments in those catalytic projects that can transform the city economically, socially, and sustainably.

These cities provide powerful case studies that are relevant to many other small cities, including my own community. While many of the lessons learned are consistent with the literature, seeing successful examples of community building can inspire other communities. This is especially true for small cities, which have a smaller published body of relevant case studies. Our community members, policymakers, and leadership may sometime be less influenced by the literature than we would like; concrete examples come change the conversation.

1 The Challenges of Smaller Cities

Any city that experiences significant decline in a dominant aspect of their economy, be it the industrial sector or some other market sector, needs to redefine itself and rebuild. This often take decades, and is especially challenging for the poorest and most disadvantaged residents.

The literature of community transformation tends to focus on larger cities. While some of the lessons learned in larger cities scale well to small and medium-sized cities, the opportunities and challenges can differ greatly. Small and medium-sized cities can be nimbler, and might be more accountable and accessible to their residents. At the same time, however, they often lack some of the resources common in larger cities, including institutions, locational benefits, economies of scale, public attention, access to capital, and a diverse pool of skilled labor.

Population and economic stagnation is all too common in cities that have lost a major part of their economy. Many small towns and post-industrial cities throughout the United States and Europe are stagnating or shrinking, but some have found ways to thrive.

The three small to medium-sized European cities that were the focus of this field research share some commonalities with Northampton, Massachusetts. All had huge declines during in the mid to late 20th century (1950-1990) in the industrial sector, hurting blue collar workers who did not have the labor and professional skills to adapt. They are experiencing varying degrees of success, and none have the problem of large-scale abandonment of buildings and lots common in many legacy cities. All are dedicated to finding unique solutions building on local assets that work for them.

2 The Case Cities

Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland

This medium-sized city of 85,000 residents is a quintessential post-industrial city, with its building stock and waterfront evidencing its industrial history. The city has a long pre-industrial history and culture, and its downtown is one of the few intact walled cities in Europe. A dramatic decline in textiles (which primarily employed women) and at the shipyards and docks (which had a predominantly male workforce) devastated the largely working class population of the city, shrinking industrial economic activity. This city has many of the challenges effecting post-industrial and post-traumatic cities: high unemployment, high poverty, low educational achievement, and other deprivations. Those challenges, and unequal investment patterns, affected populations differently, reducing social equity and increasing friction between winners and losers.

Its sectarian and political divisions have also created a dramatic residential physical segregation. The “Troubles,” the sectarian and political violence that dominated Northern Ireland for three decades, divided the city, socially and physically hollowing out downtown. Since the peace took hold, the city has become a partial model of recovery, transformed by arts, public infrastructure

investments, private sector investments, quasi-public economic development, downtown management, political and governmental reform and reorganization, and by hope and commitment. Unfortunately, unemployment, especially for working class residents, remains stubbornly high and reflects the ongoing weaknesses of the local economy. The city also remains isolated from the island’s economic engines along the Belfast to Dublin corridor and the United Kingdom, limiting prospects for private and public investment. Nonetheless, the positive transformation it has experienced thus far holds many lessons for other smaller cities, and the Derry~Londonderry City of Culture 2013 investments show how art and the world stage can reinvigorate a community.

York, England

York is a wealthy destination, tourist, and university community of 200,000 residents, and is not a typical post-industrial city, as it was never dominated by industry. For working class residents, however, the decimation and collapse of railroad car manufacture and confectionary/chocolate production, previously representing 20 percent of the city’s economic activity, wiped out many of the well-paying jobs for those without higher education. While the growth of offices, tourism, and a new university more than

made up for the loss of jobs and economic activity, many of the people who lost the jobs have not found their own niche in the new economy. This is true for their children as well. High rents have displaced many of these workers,

Derry~Londonderry has become a partial model of recovery, transformed by arts, public infrastructure investments, private sector investments, quasi-public economic development, downtown management, political and governmental reform and reorganization, and by hope and commitment.

Figure 1: A Closer Look at the Author’s Three Primary Case Studies

	Derry, NI	York, England	Vejle, Denmark
Population	149,224 (2015)	198,051 (2011)	54,388-city 111,743-municipality (2015)
Unemployment	7.1%	1.8%	3.5% (regional)
Median Age	35 (2011-Eurostat)	38 (2011-Eurostat)	31 (2015)
Median Income	\$23,593	\$35,287	\$45,700
Population projection	0% change	+0.9% annually	+0.4% annually
Workforce 16-64	66%	80.8%	74.5%

Sources: Derry: Community Planning Resource Support Pack, June 2015, Derry City and Strabane District Council; Eurostat; York: UK Census; York City Council website (York.gov.uk); data.gov.uk; Eurostat; Vejle: Statistics Denmark: Statbank.DK; Triangle Region: trekantomraadet; Vejle commune: data.vejle.dk

Figure 2: Case Cities

City	Major Industrial Decline	Other Challenges	Economic engines (partial)
Derry	Port and textile	The Troubles conflict	Downtown, tourism, arts, universities, manufacturing,
York	Chocolate and railroad car manufacturing	Regional manufacturing and coal decline	Vibrant downtown, university, economy, wealth
Vejle	Port and textile	Sea level rise, flooding	Nearby Lego headquarters, manufacturing, downtown
Manchester	Heavy manufacturing	Social inequities, high deprivation	World class city, office hub, downtown
Fredericia	Port and chemical	Isolation from regional magnets	Deep foundation investment, downtown
Northampton	Machine tool and legacy manufacturing	Low median wage	Universities, medical, downtown, mixed economy

leading to longer and more expensive commutes for low-end jobs. Yet York shows how a great quality of life can be achieved by building on history and assets. Winning the European Tourism City award (2007), York is by many accounts the most visited city in the England after London, eclipsing even much larger cities.

Vejle, Denmark

The “Manchester of Denmark,” Vejle’s economy was built on cotton mills, heavy industry, and its port. Textiles have disappeared, leaving some high technology manufacturing and docks, with government-sponsored incubators bringing in new investments and attracting entrepreneurs. Today Vejle has a focus on improvement to quality of life (e.g., the expatriate-led “Vejle er mit Brooklyn!” or “Vejle is my Brooklyn!” campaign), and has become a desirable bedroom community¹ for professionals and expatriates working at the nearby Legoland.

¹ Generally defined as a community where most residents who have jobs commute to employment centers.

Because this low-lying city is at great risk of flooding, Vejle has also focused on improving sustainability, which helped it become one of the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities. It is a growing regional hub.

In addition to the research focus of Derry, York, and Vejle, I spent a little time looking at nearby cities that provided some additional useful lessons.

Manchester, England

Manchester is a large city, so it does not fit into my primary focus, but is interesting to consider for this research for a number of reasons. It is the center of a region that declined with the collapse of coal and heavy manufacturing; it experienced extensive downtown damage from an IRA bomb in 1996; it has incredible ethnic diversity; and it has a mix of thriving and depressed neighborhoods.

Fredericia, Denmark

Fredericia is a small (40,000) post-industrial city near Vejle that lost some of its largest employers with the closure of a chemical plant and a major decline in its port activities. Yet, faced with twin threats that have led to the dramatic decline of other communities, Fredericia is focused on keeping its downtown alive and rebuilding its waterfront. This is a long-term effort that is still in its infancy, but regardless of whether the effort is ultimately as successful as envisioned, it is a testament to what vision and a willingness to invest can do for a community.

3 Background

Call them post-industrial cities, rust belt, shrinking cities, weak-market cities, or legacy cities; they are all cities where one sector of the economy — typically industrial, port, and/or mineral extraction, as well as related service and retail — were once the primary economic engine but no longer serve that role. Many of these cities’ challenges are shared by other cities, be it a period of disinvestment in urban centers or other disruptive economic changes. (See, for example, discussions in Mallach 2012B; Mallach & Brachman 2013; Ploger 2012; and Ploger 2015.)

The terms are not synonymous. Post-industrial is a blanket term relating to an economy that no longer relies on heavy industry. Legacy cities, or shrinking cities, have suffered significant population and economic activity loss, and are the worst hit of the post-industrial communities. Weak-market cities have lost the majority of the economic activity that once supported them. The commonalities are disruptive economic change and a period where growth is no longer the dominant paradigm.

It is interesting to observe how small and medium-sized cities recover from disruptive changes. Smaller cities share many challenges with larger cities and often have some unique opportunities. These smaller cities, however, can also have greater challenges accessing capital, resources, and national attention than their larger counterparts.

While these cities exist throughout the United States and Europe, they are especially concentrated in older areas that developed with the industrial revolution and later periods of industrialization. In the United States, these cities are heavily concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest. In Europe, these cities are found in the Rhine-Ruhr Valley, northern England/Wales/southern Scotland, Northern Ireland, northern Italy, and industrial sections of the former Eastern Bloc. With the decline and the mechanization of many heavy

industrial enterprises throughout the 20th century, especially from 1960 to 1990, and the race riots and suburban flight of the 1960s through 1980s, many of these cities lost their primary economic driver and went into steep decline and disinvestment.

Many of these cities could be “opportunity cities,” cities where lower real estate prices, underutilized real estate and public space, enormous human capital, and other unique opportunities can help fuel reinvestment and revitalization. Some are even “comeback cities,” cities that are already on a very positive trajectory. In the nomenclature of cities, it is the “opportunity city” or “comeback city” labels, not the negative labels, that inspire us to think about what these places can become and how they can get there.²

In a weak-market city, the market is not strong enough to backfill all of the lost jobs, economic activity, and wealth that has been lost. New York City, for example, has lost 90 percent of its manufacturing jobs since the end of World War II (going from 1 million to 100,000 per Ross, 2008). This is a larger decline in this one sector than most “post-industrial” cities, but it is not considered a legacy city, a shrinking city, or a weak-market city because it found new activity (most significantly finance and service as well as an across-the-board vitality driven by immigration, tourism, commerce, arts, and culture) to replace those lost industrial jobs and allow the economy to continue to grow.

Some post-industrial cities are successful — think Pittsburgh with its high quality of life — and some are even growing again, while others are still struggling. Almost all, however, have a legacy of the loss of a major part of their industrial, manufacturing, shipping, or mineral extraction

² The terms were adopted from Carlyle 2014 and Ploger 2015 during a May 2015 retreat of planners and sustainability professionals from Albany, Burlington, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Northampton, and St. Louis, which built on this GMF fellowship.

Smaller cities...can also have greater challenges accessing capital, resources, and national attention than their larger counterparts.



Bridge in York marking the city's participation in the 2014 Tour de France.

States, suburban flight from urban core areas to suburban areas has exasperated the problem, often leaving many lower income and less educated populations behind. In those cities, there may be localized and devastating disinvestment even if the metropolitan region has experienced population and economic growth. In communities with highly fractured political jurisdictions, the loss of tax revenue and the lack of tax base sharing makes the winners and losers all the more apparent.

and processing sectors and have infrastructure that was designed to serve needs that no longer exist. These post-industrial cities, along with many other U.S. cities, also typically have major areas of disinvestment, even when some portions of the cities or metropolitan areas are booming. Martin Luther King, Jr. described them as “A lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.”

The decline of urban core areas in post-industrial cities is driven by larger economic trends and large-scale industrial restructuring. In many cities, decline is spread over the entire urban metropolitan area. In many other cities, especially in the United

The income and opportunity disparities within metropolitan regions can be devastating. The loss of industrial and port-sector jobs disproportionately affects those with low-income, low education attainment, and the least resources. The resulting disinvestment in industrial areas and areas for housing of industrial workers and related services exasperates the problem. As a way of mitigating these trends, many planners and sustainability directors have therefore embraced the concept of social equity in order to ensure that areas with high concentrations of poverty and people of color receive their “fair share” of public resources.

4 Insights and Inspiration for Smaller Cities

The literature suggests that there are four unifying elements that declining and shrinking cities need to address in order to be successful. They need to change physically to accommodate smaller populations, restore both key institutions and city centers/downtowns as urban anchors, develop change-oriented governance and leadership, and develop stronger urban and regional partnerships (Mallach 2012B and Mallach & Branchman 2013).

Perhaps the most universally accepted rule is that a truly successful city needs to find its niche and culture and build on its own unique assets. Cities obviously should learn from precedents elsewhere and implement tested ideas, but they need to embrace that they are a distinctive place, and not simply try to create a generic city or make an exact copy of the latest cool approach that worked somewhere else. Unfortunately, while this is well represented in the literature (see Community Partnership for Arts and Culture 2008, Mallach & Brachman 2013, Ploger 2012, and Ploger 2015) and planners and urbanists understand this lesson, there is sometimes a tendency, especially in smaller cities with less diversity and opportunity, to copy the details from other places. This often results in unmemorable cities: downtowns that feel like malls, generic street banners selected from a catalogue (e.g., <http://polebanner.info>), or generic art installations such as fiberglass cows (e.g., cowpainters.com), to name just a few.

My case studies helped me explore the search for how smaller industrial cities can build on their assets and forge their own path toward revitalization. These characteristics build on the four elements mentioned above in that they are most relevant to the context of smaller post-industrial cities. The most interesting stories in the three communities were about 1) arts and culture, 2) downtown revitalization, 3) catalytic and transformational public infrastructure

investments, 4) approaches to equity and sharing of benefits, and 5) political commitments to strategic, comprehensive, and sustainable approaches.

Arts and Culture

The transformative power of arts and culture is perhaps the most cross-cutting aspect of regeneration — making a city “cool” by finding its own niche. Arts and culture regeneration efforts cannot simply focus on bringing culture and the arts to the masses but should also find that unique voice that resonates with the community and gives the community ownership of its narrative. One of the benefits of arts and culture investments is that such investments can promote social equity and become a great equalizer in community members’ sense of belonging, even when significant economic differences remain.

Derry/Londonderry is changing the mental image that its residents, visitors, and others had of a declining industrial city where the fire that ignited Northern Ireland’s “Troubles” was sparked. Focusing on arts and culture is a key to this change. The Derry~Londonderry City of Culture 2013 was designed as a catalyst to build on four themes, “unlocking creativity, creative connections, digital dialogue, and creating a new story.” It was phenomenally successful at building local civic pride and creating a unique story unmatched anywhere else in Northern Ireland. In a city torn by three decades of sectarian and political violence and failed political settlements, it is amazing to see both sides of the sectarian and political divide involved in participatory planning as creators and consumers of culture. Residents of the city and elsewhere in Ireland and the United Kingdom talk about how performances and temporary and permanent art installation helped “create a new story” and a new mental map of the city, a map not quite as divided as that between traditionally Protestant and traditionally Catholic.

A truly successful city needs to find its niche and culture and build on its unique assets.

Vejle art projects, while not transformative in the way Derry's art projects are, have created a public conversation and strengthened community identity with much smaller budgets.

The transformative power of arts, culture, and artists is a familiar story. My own community, Northampton, Massachusetts, emerged from its own downtown decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s led by artists and other entrepreneurs who saw the promise of a city with good bones. What sets Derry/Londonderry apart, however, was the ability of the arts to provide an alternative story to the world, and more importantly to its own residents, of hope and emergence from violence. “Cultural Democracy! Perception first, economics second,” explained Shona McCarthy, former chief executive of City of Culture. The City of Culture was intended to be the start of a long-term cultural focus to transform and build community.

At the same time, the limits to the ability of arts to transform are also clear in Derry/Londonderry. While the economic multipliers of direct City of Culture investments were enormous — £100 million, or over \$140 million, of cultural programming and infrastructure can be tied back to the designation — the jury is still out on the long-term economic benefits to local artists, and city employment and economic trends remain very weak. “We have everything we need, except for jobs,” said Sean McMonagle of Sinn Fein. The City of Culture simply did not create an economic transformation, said Professors Philip Bolland and Brendan Murtagh at Queens University in Belfast in an interview with the author. Government austerity has made the City of Culture more of a one-time event than a long-term legacy investment, limiting the success of the effort.

It is easy, and common, to oversell the short-term transformative effects of arts and culture investment. Derry will most likely never be as traditionally economically successful as the Belfast-to-Dublin corridor, but it can still capitalize on both its artistic and creative richness as sparks to move its economy forward. Within the context of Northern Ireland, Derry has a unique story built on

local culture that has helped to reunite the city and to build a self-perception that the city can move forward. All of that is a prerequisite to any success.

For other cities, the culture and a self-perception of opportunity depends on unique opportunities. York's tourism economy and its identity have long been connected to its two-millennium-old history, its wall, the York Ministry, and its railroad and confectionary history. More recently, York worked with community groups and their social networks to help make the York legs of the Tour de France (2014) and the Tour de Yorkshire (2015) a community cultural theme and build the sense of York as a happening place.

Vejle has long served as a downtown retail center with a regional draw. Although a much smaller city, it has continued to focus on arts and culture to add value for residents and continue its regional reputation. Vejle art projects, while not transformative in the way Derry's art projects are, have created a public conversation and strengthened community identity with much smaller budgets. For example, the Vejle Deep Storage Star, the largest unsupported steel sculpture in Denmark by the controversial Danish artist Kristian von Hornsleth, helped spark debate about cultural identity. The much-less controversial Vejle Umbrellas are simply a quirky permanent display of hanging umbrellas above a plaza, adding color and a unique look. Deeply transformational art is always a benefit, but Vejle shows that relatively small, well-targeted investments such as the Vejle Umbrellas have been an important part of the city's revitalization pathway. Though it is difficult to quantify the exact economic benefits, these efforts have created an economic magnet, a sense of place and belonging, and a sense of “punching well beyond our weight” (a term, incidentally, used by community members in all three of the primary case study communities).

Downtown Revitalization

A vibrant city center is a critical part of any successful and healthy city. As Gertrude Stein famously said, however, “there is no there there” in some communities, no defined place where residents come together for the planned and random economic and social life that makes a city work. Derry’s downtown is perhaps especially “resilient,” benefiting from a strong compact physical form, dense housing within walking distance of downtown, and a population that is focused on downtown, as Northern Ireland’s chief planner, Fiona McCandles, said in an interview with the author. She acknowledges, however, that downtown suffers from few residents because of the legacy of the Troubles, and from a former Trouble-driven approach that any downtown investment was good investment, even when urban design was highly questionable or obviously poor so as to detract from the urban quality of the downtown area.

The Derry City Centre Initiative, working along with many peace, reconciliation, and community development partners, has helped restore what was a moribund downtown by building on the unique physical and social aspects of the city. Like downtown managers everywhere, the initiative provides support for façade improvement and marketing. More interestingly, it works to heal divisive sectarian and political issues that otherwise hurt downtown. It chairs a “Unity of Purpose” group of stakeholders on issues such as disaffected and disadvantaged youths, safety, trust building, and undertaking such action items such as implementing the “Maiden City Accords,” the shared etiquette of how sectarian marches should be held so as to limit one of the primary remaining post-Troubles flash points.

Vibrant city centers need vibrant communities and a magnet to draw people in. In Vejle, “the focus is on the good life,” said Jonas Kroustru, Vejle chief

resilience officer. Without a university, many youths move away to attend university and never return. The best way for the city to compete is to focus on quality of life, social and environmental resilience, climate adaptation, and a “co-government” that “co-designs” the community with its residents and through community partnerships. Vejle recently opened a new park adjacent to downtown, for example, which was co-designed with girls to serve their specific needs since so many existing public spaces are designed by men. Although its efforts are in their infancy, Vejle is working to co-design social housing and public realm spaces to meet the needs of immigrants and minorities, the fastest growing population in Vejle. These efforts will help build the community and downtown as the center of community.

Manchester, England, had gone into an economic free fall with the collapse of its industrial base, aggravated by the devastation of part of its downtown by the largest bomb ever set off by the Irish Republican Army. Initial redevelopment efforts were not especially sensitive to the sense of place. The second wave of redevelopment, however, capitalized on its unique heritage. Manchester is becoming a city that embraces its past as the key to its downtown identity. The best of Manchester’s revitalization builds on Manchester’s historic buildings, heritage, canals, and water and makes it unique. The vibrant downtown does not solve the deep inequities within Manchester income levels and education attainment, but it does help stimulate the economy and provide a sense of place.

Public Infrastructure Investments

Public investment, hopefully catalytic, in infrastructure and the public realm is critical to improving cities. While some investments are very modest, public projects can be extremely expensive and controversial, and often raise issues of who wins and who loses. Expensive projects

The best way for a city to compete is to focus on quality of life, social and environmental resilience, climate adaptation, and a co-government” that “co-codesigns” the community with its residents and through community partnerships.



Peace Bridge, Derry

that support gentrification of low income areas, especially when there may be some displacement of residents, are extremely controversial. There is a large body of literature questioning the worthiness of public financial investments in sports stadiums and infrastructure and regulatory investment in casinos and gaming. There is no question that often public dollars have not been used wisely or in the interest of social equity and entire communities.

Public investment at all scales, however, is a necessary ingredient for community revitalization, even more so in post-industrial and weak-market communities where it is not possible to obtain private investment for public infrastructure. From my three case studies, there are clear lessons learned on what kind of projects pay huge dividends.

Derry/Londonderry, with support from Northern Ireland, the U.K., and the European Union, made two especially transformational mega-infrastructure investments. The first was the pedestrian Peace Bridge across the River Foyle. Prior to the bridge, the city was literally divided

between the mostly Protestant east bank and the mostly Catholic west bank, with few opportunities and few reasons to cross. There was relatively little mixing between the two communities, and much of the Protestant retail spending leaked out of the city (30 percent retail leakage, according to Gerald McCleave, director of regeneration and planning for Ilex Regeneration Company). The bridge

changed the mental map of residents, building a vision of being one unified city and allowing the city to retain much of the retail spending that previously left. Public comments at the bridge dedication included “It’s like being in a European city... No need to go to Spain for holiday,” according to Maura Fox, planning manager for the Derry City Council.

The second transformational infrastructure investment is the ongoing redevelopment of the former Ebrington Barracks on the east bank of the river, which is directly connected to downtown via the new Peace Bridge. During the Troubles, this was a heavily fortified military base that was a symbol of the military approach to policing, but it no longer had a peacetime role. While development is proceeding slowly and private sector successes are still limited, the project already houses government offices and potential for more private sector offices and a creative industries incubator. More importantly, it has already transformed what was

for many a hated symbol of a dysfunctional system. Jobs matter, but so does powerful symbolism.

In Vejle, public investments in two highly successful incubators are creating jobs and new enterprises, and are redefining the city. The Spinderihallerne (Spinning Mill) complex, a former mill, is now a municipally run incubator for small creative design firms. The new Green Tech Center, co-sponsored by the municipality, industry, and academia, is a place to test the technology needed for the smart grid that will eventually support a 100 percent renewable energy electric grid. Both are creating jobs, attracting new capital, spinning off new businesses, attracting expatriate businesses, and promoting economic, environmental, and social resiliency. Both projects also include more public financial and capital commitment than most similar sized communities in the United States are politically capable of making.

In Fredericia, Denmark, industrial and port decline slashed local economic activity. The city agreed to partner with a Danish foundation on a total redevelopment of the waterfront, with the city funding 25 percent of the initial cost. It is an enormous project, which will not be fully realized for at least 20 years, and therefore required political and financial risk taking and a long-term vision not commonly seen in the United States. However, it is providing an opportunity for the city to thrive and not become one of Denmark's ubiquitous shrinking small cities (Tim E. Andersen, Fredericia C Project Director and Helle Neigaard, Planner, Fredericia).

Equitable Sharing of Benefits

Equitable treatment of all citizens, social equity, and social cohesion of the entire community is critical to a healthy city. Most cities try to strike a balance between bringing in new businesses to create jobs, wealth, and economic opportunities, and ensuring that the needs of existing residents are met. In

York, the British Town and Country Planning Act ensures that community benefit agreements³ are incorporated into project agreements, something that is common in the United States. In York, as in booming areas of the United States, this process is easy because the community has a strong negotiating position. In more economically depressed communities in the United States or Europe, however, investors with other options will not come to a community if the costs are too high.

In Derry, like in many cities in the United States, a period of national austerity has made it more difficult to secure community benefits from some new private investments. "The economy is very public-sector dependent, in post-traumatic stress, reliant on disappearing social housing, and on the dole," said Maura Fox, planning manager for the Derry City Council. Transforming this economy during a time of austerity is an enormous undertaking. Doing it in a way that is equitable is probably the biggest challenge that Derry faces. Fox explained that while the city has some high tech success stories, the call centers that come and go never develop the roots that industry had and do not provide the higher wages and dependable jobs that the community needs.

Public safety, and a confidence in police and public safety efforts, is a key ingredient in making city centers vibrant and attractive for all residents. This is especially true for a city like Derry. "Good policing requires an evolution from a time when the police primarily served just the Loyalist political system to a time when both the communities and the police see all being served equally," said Jim Roddy, director of the Derry City Center Initiative.

³ Community benefit or project agreements are agreements between a project developer and a community, regulatory agency, or local organization whereby in return for project approval or support, the developer agrees to make certain investments to benefit the local residents and/or neighborhood (e.g., local jobs, streetscape or park improvements) as a form of project mitigation and to share the benefits of public investment.

Equitable treatment of all citizens, social equity, and social cohesion of the entire community is critical to a healthy city.

[There is a] need to build social cohesion and ensure that all groups are treated equally, bridging divides, whether sectarian and political in Northern Ireland or ethnic and racial in England, Denmark, or the United States.

Sean McMonagle of the Sinn Fein political party adds that while integrating the police (Catholic and Protestant) is useful, it may not address the basic problem. “Even during the Troubles, something like 7 percent of the police were Catholic, but they were still Unionist so their religion didn’t matter,” he says. “What we need are professionals. What we have is a ‘canteen culture’ where many new inductees into the police services lose their idealism and gain the dominant cynicism that exists.” The conversations about police where even police forces with diverse ethnic and racial membership have been co-opted by a conservative police culture and not focused on the needs of all community member sounds like conversations taking place in many African-American and minority communities in the United States.

Related to this is the need to build social cohesion and ensure that all groups are treated equally, bridging divides, whether sectarian and political in Northern Ireland or ethnic and racial in England, Denmark, or the United States. Derry/Londonderry’s aspirational blueprint, *Regeneration Plan for Derry~Londonderry - One City, One Plan, One Voice* (known as *One Plan*) (Ilex 2011) is built on two guiding principles, mainstreaming equity and embedding sustainability. The plan states that “Equity is a cornerstone on which the regeneration process, structure and proposals have been built and will be delivered from.” Its mission statement reads, “Our mission is: to deliver renewal — economic, physical, and social — building a stronger and more vibrant economy with increased prosperity for our city and region in ways which ensure *that opportunities and benefits from regeneration towards the most deprived groups in our communities*” (emphasis added).

Vejle’s focus and commitment is to meet the needs of refugees and immigrants as that population grows from its current 11 percent of the city population to a projected 17 percent. Although that

number is still far less than in many U.S. cities, it is huge in the Danish context, where many small cities are experiencing a rapid migrant influx and where large-scale immigration is a relatively new phenomenon. This commitment requires political cultural shifts and buy-in, even in light of a small but growing right-wing anti-immigration movement. This effort includes housing and skills building, common approaches in the United States as well, but is also focused on relationship building and process to integrate new and minority residents (Ulla Varneskov, Vejle coordinator for integration and public housing strategies).

In York, many blame high housing costs and high rates of homeownership for driving out working class residents who cannot afford to live close to their place of work and are forced to have longer and more expensive commutes. The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation have invested heavily to pioneer some of the earliest models of mixed-use, mixed-income, and mixed-tenure housing. The foundations and their parent donor began in 1925 with the affordable Garden Village, New Earswick, one of the first such efforts. More recently, they have invested in Derwentrope, mixed tenure and mixed-income sustainable housing community. Both projects have strong mixed income community cohesion (Professor Sarah West, University of York). Jane Grenville, trustee of the York Trust and deputy vice chancellor at the University of York reports that throughout the city there is a “battle for the soul of the city,” whether it should be a small village or should embrace growth. As Carolyn Snell of the University of York also mentioned, this battle often plays out in rural versus urban terms.

Political Commitments

Political commitments to strategic, comprehensive, and sustainable approaches are a critical part of

Social Equity through Third-Sector or Non-Government Organizations

When Alexander de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* (1835-40), he discussed the unique civil society in the United States and its ability to serve the needs of all citizens. The United States retains its reputation for having extremely robust third-sector or non-profit civil society. Interestingly, all three case study communities had strong, but unique, third-sectors.

Sean McMonagle, a Sinn Fein staffer in Derry and formerly involved in numerous Derry civil society groups, believes that the Troubles helped create an especially robust civil society to fill a void in community governance when there was no faith in government. He reports that community groups, with volunteers of all ages, provide neighborhood leadership for desperately needed community services in all of the neighborhoods and are best suited at addressing “social deprivation” in the most challenged areas. This model leverages community efforts with public funding. He is concerned, however, that austerity and the siren song of mega-projects chasing increasingly limited resources may deprive the city of investing directly in the communities most in need. Civil society may come from the community, but it needs to leverage public funds to survive and be effective.

If in Derry volunteers are of all ages, in York they are almost exclusively middle-class professional retirees, reports Luke Barnett, executive director of yorkCVS. York is a destination community for professionals and once there, they tend to retire in place, ready to give back to the community. Professional non-profit organizations, especially the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, fill some of the void not met by volunteers.

In Vejle, there is a strong compact with government, and the social welfare state is expected to address community needs, according Ulla Varneskov, coordinator for integration and public housing strategies. There are, however, strong associations of professionals, tenants, property owners, and the like who support the needs of their own members.

In addition to volunteer efforts and formal city efforts, communities often assess their needs to make sure that all are being served. In Belfast, for example, there is an effort to formally assess a new multiuse trail system to understand its health impacts to determine who benefits from it and if the benefits are equitable.

any successful city’s strategy. Some cities large and small, post-industrial and otherwise, have clear visions backed by strong political commitments. Many, however, do not. To varying degrees, all of the three primary case study communities focused on building political commitment to support their planning.

For example, Vejle joined the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities program because it recognized that much of its downtown is at risk for localized flooding and sea level rise; it had the political will to acknowledge the challenges and invest in change. Vejle’s planning process includes a revised city plan every four years, with the term of the plan to match City Council terms for maximum political

buy-in and connection to the city budgeting process. The plan provides the framework for the city’s commitment to resiliency and sustainability, urban design, concentrating city life in the center, and making the city more attractive to young people (Søren Nellemann, Plan Engineering and Environmental).

Derry has a clear vision to unite the community and create an aspirational consensus vision (*Derry One Plan*). At the same time, even with the somewhat weak Northern Ireland coalition government, Derry is embracing the decentralization of many planning functions from the national government to city government. A large majority of the *One Plan* is dependent

on national actions (Gerald McCleave, Ilex Regeneration Company), requiring political acumen. Much of the remainder of the plan requires the political will to convert it into a regulatory governing plan.

Part of any political commitment is ensuring that regulatory, investment, and staffing structures support strategies. Northern Ireland's decentralization strategy provides greater local political accountability and opportunity for local leadership. At the same time, however, it provides two distinct risks. First, political leadership can create interference with the professional and skilled planners being transferred from the national government to city government. Second, and

perhaps a greater risk, a skilled but not necessarily entrepreneurial civil service bureaucracy will not thrive in a local political environment. Professor Geraint Elias of Queens University in Belfast reports that for some planning bureaucrats, the priority is not to "do the right thing, but to do it the right way." He points out that if most of the profession works for central or city council government, there are not many independent professionals to challenge assumptions. He predicts a "cultural-fallout" from decentralization, for better or worse. The outcome of this process may provide lessons for how planners in the United States can best balance professionalism and consistency with entrepreneurial and risk-taking perspectives.

5 Policy Recommendations

These lessons provide clear policy implications for small opportunity cities, including Northampton, Massachusetts.

- First, and perhaps most importantly, each city should create an overall design and policy solution that is unique to that city, building on its own niche, culture, assets, and opportunities. Cities, of course, need to learn from other cities and precedents, to borrow from what works elsewhere, and to build on successful ideas. Each community is unique, however, and a comprehensive approach will leave enormous opportunities and resources on the table if it does not build on that community's unique identity.
- Second, cities, especially small opportunity cities, need to focus on creative approaches and capacity building. Although virtually every community in the country complains about a lack of resources, small opportunity cities, on the average, demonstratively have less than average resources. Being creative can make up for lower resources, ignite community passions, and create scrappy, creative and entrepreneurial approaches that provide greater success per dollar invested than most communities. Embracing these creative approaches is often the only viable alternative for communities that just do not have the resources of wealthier counterparts. Only these approaches can counter the trend toward entrenched bureaucracy and inertia that can grow in any public or private institution.

Northampton has creative leadership, staff, and boards who focus on honoring scrappiness and on how limited resources can encourage more creative solutions. For example, the city explored whether traffic mitigation funds collected from developers can be used for an arts installation in the

center island of a new roundabout — mitigation to slow the speed of traffic, but that can also create a sense of community identity.

- Third, cities must embrace creative and entrepreneurial approaches, and their risk. Some of these approaches will fail, but most will succeed. So long as the failures are not “stupid” or huge, the balance should support some risk taking. This requires a mindset at both the political and professional level that accepts some uncertainty.
- Fourth, cities need to adopt both strategic visions, responding to opportunities as they arise, and comprehensive long-term aspirational visions. This need applies to all cities of any size, whether fast growing communities, slow-growing communities, or shrinking cities trying to downsize gracefully. Some of cities' greatest successes come from working together to create shared aspirational but achievable visions, and not always from simply responding to events. For small opportunity cities, however, this is especially important if for no reason other than otherwise residents develop low morale when they feel that their community is on a downward trajectory.
- Fifth, all communities of any size, but especially small opportunity cities struggling for their identity, need to provide a laser-like focus on their city center, downtown, and commercial cores. No community can be vibrant and healthy without lively downtowns and commercial centers. The traditional Main Street Center approach (i.e., organization, promotion, design, economic restructuring) and more detailed efforts (especially adding downtown housing, improving walkability, bikeability and transportation, ensuring public

Each city should create an overall design and policy solution that is unique to that city, building on its own niche, culture, assets, and opportunities.

No community can be healthy if success only exists in isolated commercial and residential neighborhoods and leaves parts of the community and concentrations of its human capital behind.

safety and the perception of public safety, improving quality of life from trees to parks to stormwater) are all critical. Most important, however, is simply a downtown-in-all-policy; be committed to downtown and think about the effect of any policy in a downtown context.

- Sixth, communities need to include a focus on community social equity. No community can be healthy if success only exists in isolated commercial and residential neighborhoods and leaves parts of the community and concentrations of its human capital behind. The literature is replete with case studies and approaches. The commonality, however, is putting social equity on the table as part of all policy formulation and ensuring that no neighborhood or class of residents are left behind or displaced. Some resources (e.g. arts and culture) are easier to spread throughout a community than others (e.g., jobs and income). While the goal should be social equity across the board, any improvement that builds a community's sense of belonging and opportunity is a step in the right direction.
- Seventh, cities need to take advantage of the transformative power of arts, artists, and culture, respecting, honoring, and focusing on place-making and history. This recommendation applies to all cities, but especially for opportunity cities that need to redefine their story, own their narrative, and transform their communities. Small opportunity cities and other post-industrial communities have many challenges, but one of their best resources is their rich histories, cultures, architectural and built resources, natural resources, and human capital, which provide the fuel for building better communities. To their advantage, post-industrial cities often have a history that strikes a chord and elicits an emotional response.

Northampton already has a dedicated arts and culture department, which is appropriate for a city that values arts and understands the role the arts had in Northampton's 1970s-1980s renaissance. Thinking about the differences between downtown revitalization, arts and culture, and transportation for the community's sake, all incredibly important, is different from thinking about all of these efforts for their transformational value. For example, in the fall of 2015, a pilot project used street-level utility boxes as canvases for public realm street art in a transitional area of downtown. This kind of art proves that innovative ideas do not have to be massive undertakings but can still bring beauty and creativity to an everyday urban fixture.

- Eighth, cities of all size, but especially small opportunities cities that lack growth-driven investments, need to be willing to make catalytic and transformational public infrastructure investments. Investments need to be examined as carefully as any private sector pro forma and not driven by political agendas or constituencies, but some amount of both political and investment risk is critical to create investments that will support the community vision and create a return on investment. While traditional mega projects (e.g., sports stadiums, casinos, and conventional halls) all have a place, projects that rebuild natural resources (especially waterfronts) and those thousands of smaller projects that build investment and neighbors (e.g., incubators to neighborhood streetscapes) affect more people and are often more important in the long run.

Northampton's political leadership is willing to invest in a strong future and support private and NGO education and private

incubators. Seeing precedents from our European case studies for communities who go so much beyond Northampton's investments will help inform the public debate of what is the best approach and what kind of investments can be both mission driven and long-term investment driven.

- Ninth, political commitments to strategic, comprehensive, and sustainable approaches and to engaging citizens in developing those approaches are critical. Citizen engagement clearly not only leads to better plans, but it can reinforce the political will to implement those plans. Citizen engagement does not, however, replace political leadership and risk taking. Such commitments can be difficult, certainly more so than simply letting events unfold, but such investments not only pay off in the long run but can create momentum and spark private investments.

As Northampton launches work on revising its already aspirational comprehensive plan, building on the experiences in Europe and elsewhere can be useful to ensure that the

city continues to lead with a vision, and does not become complacent and simply respond to events. In the fall of 2015, the city kicked off a climate adaptation planning process with deep citizen engagement. Considering it is a non-coastal city, without the worry of sea level rise, Northampton's effort will be much deeper than that of many communities because of the support citizens have shown to the effort during the initial engagement phase.

- Finally, political, professional, and NGO leaders need to focus on an all-of-the-above approach. It is clear that no one strategy can prevail. Transformation driven by art and culture, public investments, and downtown revitalization efforts, for example, can be catalytic in terms of helping a community own its narrative, attracting investment, and rebuilding neighborhoods, but by itself such investment does not necessarily repair an underinvested community or help structurally under-skilled workers find appropriate jobs and training opportunities.

Political, professional, and NGO leaders need to focus on an all-of-the-above approach. It is clear that no one strategy can prevail.

6 Conclusion

Derry, York, Manchester, Vejle, and Fredericia all provide great lessons for rebuilding small opportunity cities in the United States. They all have some challenges of their own, and some of their lessons may not be transferrable to the U.S. context, but their experiences offer a reservoir of ideas and useful and creative precedents.



Spinderihallerne popup garden, Vejle, Denmark

Most of all, these communities provide inspiration in their crafting of clear strategic and comprehensive visions that engage the entire community, making major new public investments, and providing a commitment to downtowns and city centers. As compared to the United States, these communities all historically had a stronger focus on social equity, a greater willingness to invest in incubators and workforce needs. All of these communities, however, still grapple with economically empowering all residents, especially as Europe struggles with an increasingly

multicultural society and the need for more pluralistic approaches.

Northampton is a vibrant community with a very strong downtown, a commitment to sustainability second to none, and a very high quality of life. Yet, in spite of having largely recovered from the post-industrial decline that occurred decades ago, Northampton remains an opportunity city because some of its ongoing challenges. Several of these policy implications are of special interest to Northampton, and will hopefully help strengthen the city.

7 References

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8 Interviews

Northern Ireland

Name	Affiliation	Date/Location
Dr. Greg Lloyd, Planning Professor & Dept. Head (retired); Deborah Peel, Chair of Architecture and Planning	School of the Built Environment, University of Ulster; School of the Environment, University of Dundee	4/9/15, Belfast
Gerald McCleave, Director of Strategy and Regeneration	Ilex Urban Regeneration Company (URC)	4/10/15, Derry
Fiona McCandless, Chief Planner for Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Dept. of the Environment	4/10/15, Derry
Shona McCarthy, Consultant and Eisenhower Fellow	Shona McCarthy Consulting, former Director of Derry City of Culture	4/11/15, Ballycastle
Maura Fox, Planning Manager	Derry City (formerly Northern Ireland Dept. of Environment)	4/13/15, Derry
Susan Mullan, Community Services Manager	Derry Council – Community Services	4/13/15, Derry
Tony Monaghan, Regeneration Officer	Derry Council – Economic Development	4/13/15, Derry
Jim Roddy, Director, City Centre Initiative	Derry City Centre Initiative	4/14/15, Derry
Lisa Donnell and Karise Hutchinson, Business School, Ulster University, Coleraine	Urban Exchange Northern Ireland	4/14/15, Derry
Sean McMonagle, Sinn Fein	Sinn Fein, Triax Neighborhood, Bogside Brandywell Initiative, Creggan Neighborhood Partnership, Gasyard Centre	4/14/15, Derry
Dr. Philip Bolland, Programme Director, Env. Science Dr. Brendan Murtagh	Queens University, School of Planning	4/15/15, Belfast
Dr. Geraint Ellis, Professor of Social Planning	Queens University, Institute of Spatial and Environmental Planning, School of Planning	4/15/15, Belfast

England

Name	Affiliation	Date/Location
Sally Burns, Director of Communities and Neighborhoods Mike Slater, Assistant Director Development, Planning and Regeneration Services Martin Grainger, Head of Planning and Environmental Management Phil Witcherley, Economy and Place Strategy Group Manager	York City Council: City and Environmental Services; Communities and Neighborhoods	4/16/15, York
Steven Cinderby, Senior Research Associate	Stockholm Environmental Institute, University of York	4/16/15, York
Dr. Jane Grenville, Deputy Vice Chancellor	University of York and York Civic	4/17/15, York
Sarah West, Research Associate	Stockholm Environmental Institute, University of York	4/17/15, York
Luke Barnett, Executive Director	York CVS (Community Voluntary Sector)	4/17/15, York
Carolyn Snell, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy	Stockholm Environmental Institute, University of York	4/20/15, York
Katherine Knox, Programme Manager	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	4/21/15, York
Catherine Parker, Professor of Marketing and Retail Enterprise	Manchester Metropolitan University Business School	4/22/15, Manchester

Denmark

Name	Affiliation	Date/Location
Lykke Leonardsen, Head of Climate Unit	Technical and Environmental Administration, City of Copenhagen	4/23/15, Copenhagen
Anne Sofie Fogtmann, Senior Consultant Mikkel Henriques, Planner	Akademikerne and Danish Nature Agency	4/24/15, Copenhagen
Peder Duelund Mortenson, Curator Housing and Welfare KADK Program	Housing and Welfare Exhibition-Architecture, Research Day 2015	4/24/15, Copenhagen
Jonas Kroustru, Chief Resilience Officer Ulla Varneskov, Coordinator for Integration and Public Housing Strategies Søren Nellemann, Plan Engineering and Environmental Anne-Mette Agermark, Development Climate & Local Communities Technology & Environment Henrik Stjernholm, Chief Architect	Vejle Chief Resilience Officer, Housing Coordinator, Chief Planner, Chief Architect	4/27/15 & 4/29/15, Vejle
Jorgen Anderson, CEO	Green Tech Center	4/29/15, Vejle
Tim E. Andersen, Project Director Helle Neigaard, Planner	FredericiaC development and Fredericia planning	4/28/15, Fredericia

The image features a dark teal background with several horizontal white lines. Small white dots are placed at various points along these lines, creating a minimalist, grid-like pattern. The lines and dots are arranged in a way that suggests a global network or a series of interconnected points.

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